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Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Ms. Dortch,

I am writing in response to the NPRM issued on October 15, 2012 (CG Docket No. 10-51). I am a Nationally Certified Sign Language Interpreter, working primarily in Video Relay Services (VRS). Recently, my employer delivered an update regarding the current status of VRS regulatory reforms under review by the FCC, and the NPRM from said date. As an interpreter, I am pleased that the FCC continues to invest in issues critical to the survival, success and use of VRS, particularly as it pertains to both the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community who utilize the services and to Interpreters as providers of the services.

It is with concern about the FCC investment toward the matter of structure and practice of VRS Programs that I am both deeply troubled and surprised that the focus is limited to cost without consideration of other critical features; first and foremost, quality of interpretation. Currently, the skills required by the FCC for VRS refer to services provided by "qualified" interpreters. The company for which I chose to work, requires their Video Interpreters (VI) to be certified. One of the reasons I chose this company was because of the standards to which they hold their employees, and consequently the services they provide. Though my employer has championed the concept of provider choice to the Deaf Community, it is because of the higher standards to which they hold their VI's, that the Deaf Community has come to depend on our company not only as part of their choice, but in helping to support the ADA's truest intention of providing 'functional equivalency...through communication access.' Sadly, the term 'qualified' as defined by most dictionaries as 1. 'officially recognized as being trained to perform a particular job' or 2. 'not complete or absolute; limited' has become nothing short of a misnomer for what more accurately is termed by my employer's requirements as "certified", defined as 'officially recognized as possessing certain qualifications or meeting certain standards.' The proposal of cutting costs by

substituting qualified interpreters (more accurately termed ‘Non-Certified’) for those with certification, not only jeopardizes the quality of the interpretation, it removes a level of choice on which the Deaf community has come to depend. Though currently the Deaf community doesn’t monetarily pay for the services, an analogy might be drawn between having one of two automobiles, where the higher priced vehicle is governed by higher standards. We all know that a Volvo is more dependable than say, a Vega. And though it may be said that the choice is open for having either, the ‘cost’ to enjoy the dependability of the higher priced, more dependable model, is inherently higher. In VRS, my employer chose to absorb the cost for the more dependable model, providing services by using certified interpreters. By cutting costs, the FCC is removing that choice to both the Deaf community to have those higher quality services (i.e. Functional Equivalency), and to my employer and consequently to any employer of equitably paid certified interpreters.

It is with great sadness that we approach the FCC and it’s proposal to modify the current rate structure for the provision of VRS. My own personal sadness comes not from the governing and oversight of our industry as that is absolutely necessitated, if not welcomed, in any industry supported by others funds, but by the drastic measures by which the FCC is addressing and will change to the point of most definitely undoing the progress and advances in history that VRS has afforded the Deaf community and it’s supporters. If the proposed changes are adopted, not only will choice of provider be eliminated for the Deaf consumer, viability of working as a Certified interpreter in VRS will not be possible. Instead, I would strongly urge the Commission to consider and adopt VRS rate and structural reform that promotes both interpreting quality and user experience whilst supporting VIs with a viable pay structure. Consideration of differential rates for VRS minutes provided by RID (Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf) -certified versus non-certified VIs, and moving the industry as a whole in the direction of requiring RID certification, or similar standardized competency regime so that those who choose to provide services through VRS will be able to meet the needs and rights of the Deaf community and continue to work toward providing the functional equivalency and choice that rightfully have become the standard for our industry and our community.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Sincerely yours,

Mary E. Herman